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COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES
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September 13, 2005

TO: Each Supervisor

FROM: Thomas L. Garthwaite, M.D.
Director and Chief Medical Officer

for Jonathan E. Fielding, M.D., M.P.H.
Director of Public Health and Health Officer

SUBJECT: **PUBLIC HEALTH IMPLICATIONS OF HURRICANE KATRINA**

On September 6, 2005, the Board approved a motion by Supervisor Burke, instructing the Director of Public Health and Health Officer to provide a report to the Board at the September 13, 2005 meeting concerning the public health implications of Hurricane Katrina and provide recommendations on any ways in which Los Angeles County could assist with the public health aspects of the recovery and rebuilding. This is the response to that motion.

Public Health Implications:

There are significant public health implications for those persons affected by Hurricane Katrina. Those who remain in areas without potable water, electricity, and adequate safe food, face significant risks of dehydration, malnourishment, and gastro-intestinal illness. It should be noted, however, that severe diarrheal illnesses, such as cholera are not anticipated. Mosquito borne illnesses, such as those caused by West Nile virus are a concern for those who remain, because of the standing water that facilitates mosquito breeding. Both those who remain and those who have evacuated who have chronic illnesses face significant hurdles in accessing ongoing care, including difficulties in obtaining prescription pharmaceuticals. Those who are sheltered in other areas should be screened for both communicable and chronic conditions.

Offers of Assistance:

When the magnitude of damage caused by Hurricane Katrina was recognized and a determination was made by the Michael Leavitt, Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS), on August 31, 2005 that a Public Health Emergency exists, we contacted to offer public health assistance to areas affected by Hurricane Katrina in the form of public health experts needed in the affected areas, including: acute communicable disease control, environmental health, and toxics epidemiology experts.

On September 3, our offer of a team of Public Health staff was confirmed to have been received and referred to Group Deployments, Office of Force Readiness and Deployment (OFRD), HHS. On September 4, HHS indicated that the best mechanism for volunteering was for interested staff to fill out individual applications. HHS indicated it will pay travel and living expenses of those DHS staff deployed.

Subsequently, HHS indicated that they would be willing to receive a team, rather than just individuals. We provided them names of individuals who are willing to volunteer and gave a point of contact. On September 9, OFRD wrote "that the personnel in Human Resources are working very hard to process all applications and get the healthcare providers credentialed. We greatly appreciate you and your team's willingness to volunteer." We understand that over 26,000 persons have registered to volunteer. We will continue to identify staff who wish to volunteer and provide their names to HHS.

Deployment of Public Health with County Team:

Based on the interstate assistance request of the State of Louisiana for assistance to the City of New Orleans, Dr. Fielding and Arturo Aguirre, Director of Environmental Health, were deployed as part of the Los Angeles County team to New Orleans. They have been working with the City Health Director, who is being assisted by staff from the CDC. Dr. Fielding has assisted with short-term and longer-term plans for public health services and Mr. Aguirre has assisted with plans to reopen certain food facilities and lodging.

Services to Evacuees in Los Angeles County:

The Department has been working with the Task Force of County and County-related agencies which are providing services to those who have already reached Los Angeles and planning for services to evacuees who may be relocated subsequently. The report to the Board on that effort is being coordinated by the Chief Administrative Office.

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We will continue to keep the Board informed of the status of our offers of Public Health support to the areas most affected by Hurricane Katrina. If you have any questions or need additional information, please let either of us know.

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c: Chief Administrative Officer
County Counsel
Executive Officer, Board of Supervisors